**“A More Excellent Way!”** **Text: I Corinthians 13 Date: 2/24/19 Sunday AM**

The church at Corinth was founded by the apostle Paul on his second missionary journey. As it turns out, the church had some tremendously, challenging issues that had to be addressed. Paul wrote two letters to his Corinthian brothers and sisters and shared with them his heart regarding these issues.

Two of the church’s most troubling issues were *the destructive doctrinal issues* and *the divisive social issues* that were present in the church. Paul did not shy away from these issues. He actually went on the offensive and challenged them to turn things around. It seems that the carnality of Corinth made great strides within the church, which weakened its influence within their community. When the Gospel is cheapened due to carnality, the church should close its doors. We exist because we believe the Gospel and understand that we are responsible for sharing it! There is no **Plan B** when it comes to our existence. Let’s see what Paul says in I Corinthians 13 and how it applies to our homes, to our church and to our community.

The Corinthians were a very gifted congregation. They had the potential to do great things for God. So do we! But notice what happened to them. They simply drifted away from the things that make churches great witnesses for Christ and the Gospel. They were well aware of what the Lord had given them in reference to spiritual gifts. At the same time, they were being Corinthianized by their neighbors and friends. Yes, they possessed potential, but they also lacked the one thing that was required for greatness in the eyes of the Lord. LOVE! Sure, God had blessed them with an abundance of spiritual gifts, but they were basically a people with empty hearts when it came to love. Let’s take an inside look and see why this is true! **1 Corinthians 12:31 says,** But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

**ILLUSTRATION:** You know on your phone, on your laptop, on your tablet, you get these annoying popups all the time. You know what I’m talking about? Saying things like there’s a new operating system and asking you to download it. These things drive me crazy. I’m a little scared by them, you can tell; trauma! But, if you don’t download the newest operating system, everything starts slowing down, so you can’t keep avoiding it. And apps won’t work; you may spend a fortune on a program and it requires the latest operating system. Until you have it, it’s just not going to work. Love, Paul is going to teach us, is “the more excellent way.” That’s how he puts it in verse 31. It is like an operating system that we must have installed in our Christian lives, without which spiritual gifts will always, always malfunction. Love is the operating system that must be installed in your Christian life without which spiritual gifts will always malfunction. And so chapter 13 seeks to answer the question, “Why does love matter so very much?”

**I. First, LOVE, A More Excellent Way Than Tongues – 13:1**

* **1 Corinthians 13:1** Though I speak with the **tongues** of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become *as* sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.
* **Hyperbole** = is an intentional overstatement to emphasize a point! Paul’s hyperbole stretches the limits of our sanctified imaginations!
* He uses a good dose of hyperbole or exaggeration throughout this chapter! It *intensifies* his verbal buildup regarding LOVE!
* Love is bigger and better than their most cherished and valued spiritual gifts! Paul tells his church family that even though they have the gift of tongues; it means **ZERO** without love.

* **13:1** ~ “The tongues of men” = This gift is referenced and exercised in **Acts 2** by Peter at Pentecost. It refers to human languages that were given by the Holy Spirit for the understanding of the Gospel.
* The Corinthians cherished the gift of tongues as the best of the gifts, making them very important persons!
* Maybe they thought something like this: Tongues put people up front. In their minds this gift made them more spiritual than their peers, producing an unhealthy spiritual hierarchy within the church body.
* Paul is making “the point that this legitimate spiritual gift loses its purpose when the speaker does not love. What is the purpose of all spiritual gifts? To build the body of Christ. Thus, if one is speaking in tongues out of pride or mere personal pleasure, then he turns what should be a blessing to the church into hollow, even harsh sounding, noise.”
* **13:1** ~ “The tongues of angels” = There is no Biblical record for the “tongues of angels.” It appears to be another example of hyperbole.
* Were Paul to have the eloquence of men and of angels without having love, he would be **ZERO!**

**Matthew 6:2** Therefore when thou doest *thine* alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

* **13:1** ~ “Sounding brass or a tinkling symbol” = Pagan religions used these instruments to get the attention or to awaken their gods. The best speech, without love means zero. *“smashing gongs, clanging cymbals and blaring trumpets”* MacArthur
* Paul is telling us that exercising the gift of tongues without love is like making a bunch of noise trying to get the attention of people… just another way to draw attention to ourselves!
* We could paraphrase it this way, “Without love, even the greatest speech is nothing but “hot air.”
* They had a lot of religious activity going on, but what good is that if it not marked by love? “Bothersome and offensive”
* **THOUGHT:** Noisemakers don’t make good band members! Noisemakers don’t make good church members either!
* **QUESTION:** Can you imagine a church going through these spiritual exercises without love? I can’t!
* First, LOVE, A More Excellent Way Than Tongues – 13:1

**II. Secondly, LOVE, A More Excellent Way Than Prophecy – 13:2**

* **1 Corinthians 13:2** And though I have *the gift of* **prophecy**, and *understand* ***all*** *mysteries, and* ***all*** *knowledge*; and though I have **all** faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.

**13:2 “Mysteries of the future” “Everything about everything”**

* **13:2** ~ Again, **“prophecy” or “forth telling”** the things of God, was a preferred gift among the Corinthians. It was a “magnified/glorified” gift! If you possessed it, you were better than your peers.

**1 Corinthians 14:3 …** he that prophesied speaks unto men *to* edification, and exhortation, and comfort.

* Note Paul’s hyperbole! **“All”**
* The Corinthians thought they were really something in their use of spiritual gifts. Paul was brutal in addressing this type of thinking. He said, “I am nothing without love!”
* **QUESTION:** Can you see how pride and arrogance would be a problem in this church? I can! I can hear it now… “Look at me, I’m prophesying!”

**Luke 12:48 “To whom much is given…”**

**Ephesians 4:15** But speaking the truth in love may grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, *even* Christ:

* **POINT:** The man that speaks the revelation of God, without love, is NOTHING! **SEE:** JESUS in Luke 19:41-44
* Motive is behind what we say and what we do! A loveless message is nothing more than self-praise and self-promotion.
* First, LOVE, A More Excellent Way Than Tongues – 13:1
* Secondly, LOVE, A More Excellent Way Than Prophecy – 13:2

**III. Thirdly, LOVE, A More Excellent Way Than Faith – 13:2**

* **1 Corinthians 13:2** And though I have *the gift of* **prophecy**, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all **faith**, *so that I could remove mountains,* and have not love, I am nothing.
* **13:2** ~ **“Faith”** too is wrapped up in exaggeration! Paul says, “**ALL** FAITH.”
* Paul is not suggesting that faith *literally* moves mountains. Again, he’s using *hyperbole/exaggeration* to make his point.
* **FAITH** is most often tested in prayer. **Hebrews 11:6 says,** But *without faith* *it is* impossible to please *Him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.
* Prayer *without love* is manipulation… manipulating GOD! We all pray at times with improper motives to get things from God!
* **James 4:3 calls us out on this sin,** You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume *it* upon your lusts.
* First, LOVE, A More Excellent Way *Than Tongues* – 13:1
* Secondly, LOVE, A More Excellent Way *Than Prophecy* – 13:2
* Thirdly, LOVE, A More Excellent Way *Than Faith* – 13:2

**IV. Fourthly, LOVE, A More Excellent Way Than Giving – 13:3**

* **1 Corinthians 13:3** And though *I bestow* **all** my goods to feed *the poor*, and though ***I give*** my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.
* **1 Corinthians 13:3 (NLT2)** If I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it; but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing.
* **13:3** ~ “Bestow all…” = “Surrender” = Who gives away “all” they possess? No one can do that unless they become dependent upon the one they gave their goods to!
* Paul’s thought gathers momentum as he drives his message towards LOVE!
* Many world religions base their religious gain upon self-denial and self-deprivation! Nonetheless, it remains self-centered!
* Some *give* from a desire for recognition and praise! Loveless giving *never* pleases God! It looks good before men, but not before God!
* **TRUTH:** Without love, these acts are anything but selfless.
* **13:3B** ~ At this time in church history they were not burning believers at the stake; that came later. Paul exaggerates again here to draw attention to the fact that you can do these very sacrificial acts without love and when you do they mean ZERO!
* Some see this as a reference to becoming a slave. Slaves were branded with a hot iron. Even going to this length is meaningless without love.
* When persecution became popular as a way of dealing with Christians. Some chose martyrdom as means of gaining fame. This is meaningless as well!
* It’s love that enriches gifts and gives them their spiritual value/worth!
* Sacrifice motivated by self-interest and pride profits nothing in the eyes of God.
* **Ray Pritchard** ~ LOVE is greater than personal sacrifice.

Without LOVE …

I say nothing,

I am nothing,

I gain nothing.

* First, LOVE, A More Excellent Way *Than Tongues* – 13:1
* Secondly, LOVE, A More Excellent Way *Than Prophecy* – 13:2
* Thirdly, LOVE, A More Excellent Way *Than Faith* – 13:2
* Fourthly, LOVE, A More Excellent Way *Than Giving* – 13:3

**Reverend Robert S. Rayburn,** “What is striking about the first three verses is that, in every case, these were powers and gifts that the Apostle Paul himself had. He was a prophet, he worked miracles, he revealed mysteries, he had suffered the loss of all things for Christ’s sake, and so on. He speaks with a special authority for no Corinthian had gifts such as the Apostle had been given. But still he will say, without love it is all worthless and I’m worthless.”

**Matthew Henry,** writing 300 years ago, noted that “it is not great knowledge that God sets a value upon, but true and hearty devotion and love.”